

REMARKS

This application has been reviewed in light of the Office Action dated April 23, 2003. Claims 1, 3, and 5-7, 9-14, and 16-19 are presented for examination. Claims 8 and 15 have been cancelled, and their recitations have been incorporated in the independent claims; this action is taken without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter. Claims 1, 3, 5, 7, 11-14, and 16-19 have been amended to define still more clearly what Applicants regard as their invention. Claims 1, 3, 5, 12, and 18 are in independent form. Favorable reconsideration is requested.

Claims 1, 3, and 5-19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,330,022 (*Seligmann*) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,025,870 (*Hardy*). Cancellation of claims 8 and 15 renders the rejection of those claims moot.

As shown above, Applicant has amended independent claims 1, 3, 5, 12, and 18 in terms that more clearly define what they regard as their invention. Applicants submit that these amended independent claims, together with the remaining claims dependent thereon, are patentably distinct from the cited prior art for at least the following reasons.

The present invention is directed to producing a virtual common space used to take a rest or the like in a TV conference or the like.

The aspect of the present invention set forth in claim 1 is a control method of a home office system which includes user terminal devices and a display device connected to the user terminal devices. The method includes providing virtual spaces for users of the user terminal devices, providing a different view for each of the virtual spaces on the display device, and monitoring the user while the user is in a certain virtual space. The method also includes

automatically changing the display of the certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest, in response when the user is determined in the monitoring step to have been in a predetermined condition for more than a predetermined time, so that the user in the changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space for rest.

The important feature of claim 1 is automatically changing the display of the certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest in response when the user is determined in the monitoring step to have been in a predetermined condition for more than a predetermined time, so that the user in the changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space for rest. Support for this feature can be found at least at page 16, lines 9-14, of the specification.

As discussed previously, *Seligmann* relates to providing a simulated video conferencing environment including live video conferees in variable conference contexts and controlling the conference during events such as 1) conferee removal, 2) temporary conferee departures or additions, and 3) changes in conferee requirements. In the *Seligmann* system, during a TV conference, a user's instruction operation is discriminated, and a display according to the discriminated operation is performed. As such, *Seligmann* may perform a conference display that is selected by a user. However, as correctly stated in the Office Action, *Seligmann* does not disclose the control step, as recited in claim 1.

For at least this reason, Applicants submit that claim 1 is clearly allowable over *Seligmann*, taken alone.

The Office Action cites *Hardy* as overcoming the deficiencies of *Seligmann*, and in particular as teaching a video conference system 1 including video switch 30 which performs switching operations, and provides selected local video information for subsequent display on the monitor 50. However, nothing has been found in *Hardy* that would teach or suggest automatically changing the display of the certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest in response when the user is determined in the monitoring step to have been in a predetermined condition for more than a predetermined time, so that the user in the changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space for rest, as recited in claim 1.

As noted previously, the newly added feature to independent claim 1 corresponds to the contents of cancelled claims 8 and 15. In the rejection of claims 8 and 15, the Office Action cites *Seligmann*, at column 9, line 67, to column 10, line 3, as disclosing the feature of those claims. Applicants respectfully disagree with this understanding of *Seligmann*. The cited portion of *Seligmann* merely states that a user may use a pop-up option icon portion 520 for selecting conference options. That is, a conferee from his or her terminal may click on icons 521, 522, 523, and so on, to view pop-up windows to interact with the conference system in real time. In contrast, in the method of claim 1, the display of the certain virtual space is automatically changed to a display of a virtual space for rest in response that the user is determined in the monitoring step to have been in a predetermined condition for more than a predetermined time. Nothing has been found in *Seligmann* that would teach or suggest automatically changing the display of the certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for

rest in response when the user is determined in the monitoring step to have been in a predetermined condition for more than a predetermined time, so that the user in the changed virtual space for rest can communicate with other users existing in the common virtual space for rest, as recited in claim 1 (if any).

Accordingly, claim 1 is believed clearly allowable over *Seligmann* and *Hardy*, taken separately, or in any proper combination.

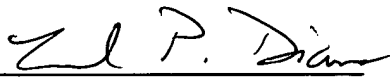
Independent claim 3 is a computer-readable storage medium claim corresponding to method claim 1, and is believed to be patentable for at least the same reasons as discussed above in connection with claim 1. Additionally, independent claims 5, 12, and 18 each include a feature similar to that discussed above, in which the display of the virtual space is automatically changed to a display of another virtual space, in response when the user is determined in the monitoring step to have been in a predetermined condition for more than a predetermined time. Accordingly, claims 5, 12, and 18 are believed to be patentable for reasons substantially similar to those discussed above in connection with claim 1.

The other rejected claims in this application depend from one or another of the independent claims discussed above and, therefore, are submitted to be patentable for at least the same reasons. Since each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, individual reconsideration of the patentability of each claim on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the present application.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York Office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



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